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ABSTRACT

A service period for youth is a reasonable idea, considering decreasing employment opportunities, increasing political and social alienation, widespread social pathologies, and the continued expansion of adolescence beyond its physiological and psychological parameters. Youth service has evolved from a federal "Great Society" concept to a more decentralized state or community version bridging the gap between high school and college. A school-based youth service would require some kind of regulation. Many educators believe that alterations in school structure will take place once the realities of our postindustrial society are widely recognized. At present, integrating a national youth service into the existing educational establishment would be extremely difficult. The service would be handicapped by bureaucracy. A better approach might be to present national or community service not as educational reform but as a social obligation with educational merit that dampens the effects of structural unemployment. Recognizing the cloudy future for national service in this country, this paper focuses on historical context, probable obstacles (subversion by educational and business bureaucracies) and the current status of the concept. Included are 1 diagram and 19 references. (MLH)

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# National Service as a Non-School Alternative to Educattion at the Secondary-Post Secondary Interface

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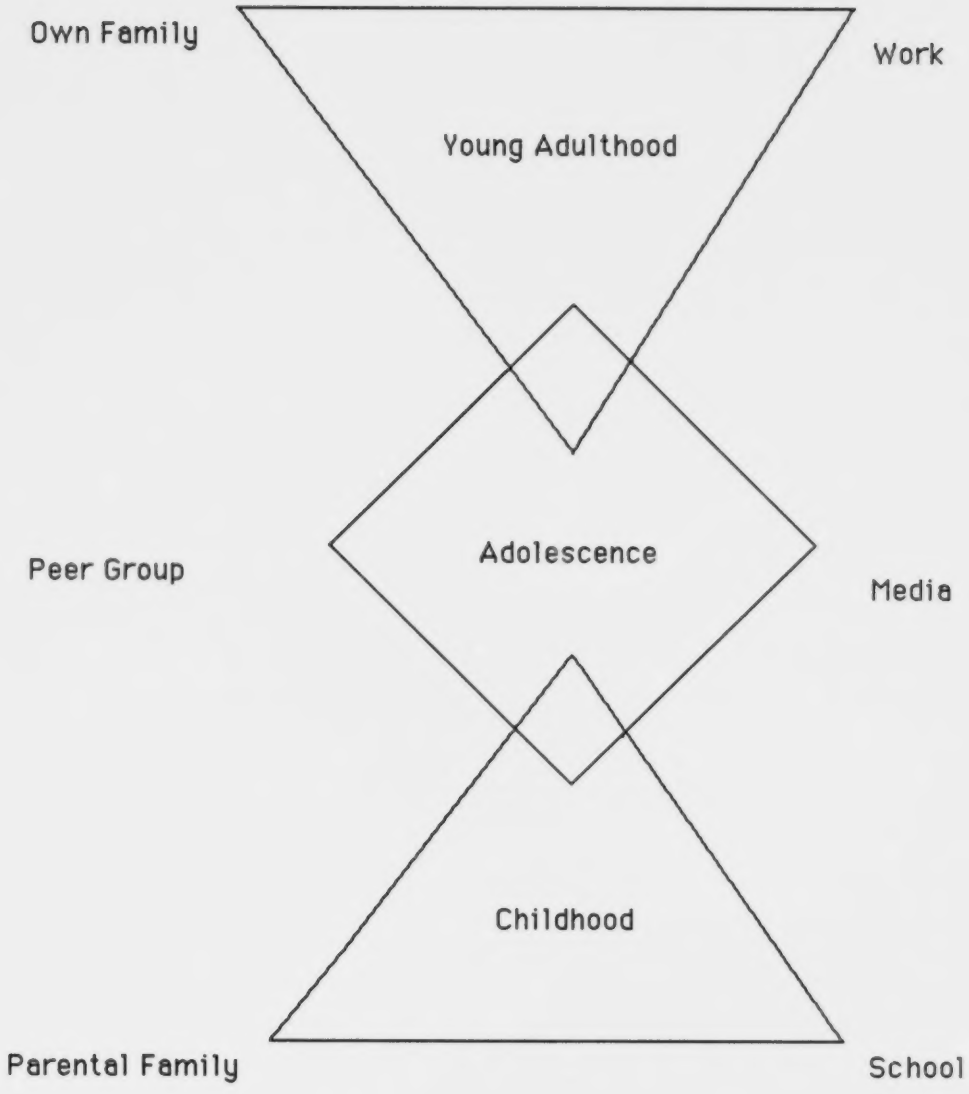


Kerr Commission 1977

## Introduction

The preceding graphic indicates the state of structure of the transition from childhood to adulthood in the United States circa 1977. It is a useful starting point for it crystalizes the problem facing youth and educational policymakers in this country today. Essentially, the problem concerns how we are to deal with an expanding adolescence? Our western corporate capitalist system has produced a situation where the normative criteria for the attainment of adult status has become diffused, but which has mainly centered around the securing of sufficient employment to be self-supporting. With the contraction of the traditional entry points of employment due to industrial decline, the reactive device of meritocracy, and increased competition from middle class women, the relatively advantaged youths have been forced into the university system to gain employable credentials while the disadvantaged have been forced into either the military or the underground economy of drugs, prostitution, or other more overtly criminal activities.

The secondary-post secondary interface has become a kind twilight zone for youths. Where graduation from high school used to be a kind of rite of passage into the adult world of work, it has now become little more than a transfer point onto other institutions which to a greater or lesser extent inhibit the attainment of adulthood and

citizenship.

The solution advanced by many in this country is known as national service. An examination of this solution as a non-school alternative for education will be the focus of this paper.

As a public policy issue, national service has been interpreted in a number of ways. Supporters, such as the National Commission on Youth see it as a prescription for a number of nagging social problems. Detractors, such as the U.S. Friends Service Committee, see it as a species of involuntary servitude, presented as a civilian draft but in fact a militaristic Trojan Horse. William James, the first American to explicitly advocate national service, saw it as a peace-enhancing device which would channel the aggressiveness of adolescent men (he didn't mention women), into constructive activities. Many know it as a peripheral issue to the great draft debates of the 60's and early 70's. Many thus also believe that national service has faded as an issue along with the draft. While plagued by both a lack of a critical mass of socio-economic crisis and passionate advocacy by key policymakers, national service has persisted and is still an emerging (albeit long-emerging) issue of considerable interest particularly to those engaged in youth policy formation.

**Definition**

Michael Sherraden and Donald Eberly, the acknowledged leading advocates of national service in America define it as a period of service given by the individual to the nation or community (Sherraden and Eberly, 1982). This broad definition carries two important points that need brief elaboration. First there is the assumption that the individual owes something to society; and second, the recognition that national service need not necessarily be service to the state. Both of these points have significant theoretical implications. The first point links national service to classical social contract theory which is a long-accepted basis for defining the individual's relationship with society in general and government in particular. The second point suggests a decentralized vision of service as a cultural feature of society and not an imposition of the state. These points have not been given enough consideration in the debate over national service, largely because many of its advocates are not theoretically inclined, and the original models of national service (as the very name implies) presumed its administration to be at the federal level. Given this basic definition of national service, policymakers have proceeded to debate over its design. Much of the debate has been over whether or not to pursue it as a centralized or decentralized program, whether government, schools, the private sector or voluntary agencies should

be involved, whether or not it should be compulsory or voluntary, selective or universal, specifically aimed at youths, and so on. Danzig and Szanton, 1986, have contributed a 4-model classification of types of national service which are useful to review. They have catagorized national service into (1) school-based, (2) draft-based, (3) voluntary, and (4) universal. The discussion from this point on shall focus on a primarily on the school-based model, but also assuming universality.

## School-Based Service

School-based service is found widely throughout the world with a clear trend in growth within the United States, although it is not overtly advertized as such here. The United States has lagged behind other areas of the world in youth policy and it shows here in the relative lack of federal interest in it. This is ironic in that the federal government developed the earliest service programs, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and much later but still a first, the Peace Corps. The reasons for this are speculative, but are tied in part to the structure and primary function of the American educational-industrial complex. It has also had to contend with our celebration of individuality to the point of social alienation (Bellah, 1985). It is a long-standing tradition in this country that

the raising of the young is a matter for the family and community. Youth policy at the state or federal level has thus been resisted despite the growing state and federal presence in the public schools.

There is also a predominant attitude that the effectiveness of education is correlated to the subsequent employability of those who pass through the system. This attitude is particularly true of the middle class in this country which has successfully developed it's own brand of character-building programs (The YMCA, and Scouting), with significant service functions built in. They are thus unconcerned with the schools developing a service function.

There is also the political ideology of our national executive leadership which, over the past six years, has maintained a libertarian attitude towards this country's entire social agenda. There are contravailing forces to this tradition however. The reasons for national service's persistant and slowly widening acceptance is its appeal to several related interests - university administrators, academicians, social theorists, opinion leaders, students, corporate elements, and the public-at-large.

***Historical Context***

Their support is based on their recognition of a continuing, and widening crisis in the structure of the American educational system,

particularly at the secondary/post-secondary interface. The history of this crisis is quite interesting but it will only be summarized here. Basically this structure has come to function as much as a means to hold youths out of a shrinking labor market as to educate them. Youth unemployment has become structural. The trend of increased adult female participation and contraction in agricultural labor demand, continuing to squeeze the young out of their traditional areas of economic expression and into post-secondary educational institutions, the armed forces or out of the system. The expansion of post-secondary education owes much of its growth to this long developing situation. This, along with the GI Bill, and the Vietnam draft, glutted the universities with male students either recently out of the military service or seeking to avoid it. Post-secondary education has now come to be rationalized as a middle-class entitlement, much as a secondary education was rationalized as the entry point into the middle class from the turn of the century to the beginning of World War II. In the transition from industrial to post-industrial society, there has manifested an economically-generated need to raise the credentialing ante (not to be confused with standards). This has led to a trivialization of secondary education to the point of its no longer being a guaranteer of discipline nor even necessarily of literacy in this country.

**The Attributes of School-Based Service**

Given this context it becomes easier to understand the support for school-based service activities. It offers practicum in what is hopefully an area of career interest to the student. It gets students out of the passive learning environment of the classroom, the radio, television and video, thereby engaging the student into, again presumably, personally and socially important work. Many theorists, from Dewey to Etzioni to Janowitz to Bellah, see this not only as education, but as a social therapy aimed at breaking the alienation we have cultivated in our cultural celebration of individuality. Etzioni speaks of service activities as enhancing mutuality. Janowitz sees it as a means of inculcating the values of citizenship. Bellah makes constant reference to transitory community and the problems that result. These theorists and others also suggest a period of service by the young for the public as a rite of passage by which they may may achieve a status of empowerment as citizens beyond that of being taxpayers, and occasional voters.

Administrators, particularly at the post-secondary level applaud service activities by students as a vindication of their mission to produce socially useful graduates. It has become their answer to the great relevancy debates of the 60's that challenged them to demonstrate the utility of university education in the world as it was

then. On the record supporters of national service include the presidents of Notre Dame, MIT, Johns Hopkins, Georgetown, Stanford, Brown, and Harvard. Most others support school-based facsimilies of national service such as cooperative education and internships in private, public, and voluntary organizations.

Leading academic research institutions also see in national service the opportunity for learning to go to the bone through direct experience. Many have recognized that the reforms of John Dewey were never really implemented and that in national service, his agenda might at last be realized. The interest by American educational think tanks in service learning has been widespread. Those investigating national service include Rand, 1977; The American Institutes for Research, 1979; The National Commission on Youth, 1979; The Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, 1979; the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1979; The Potomic Institute, 1979; The Sloan Commission on Government and Higher Education, 1980; The Gallup organization, 1972, 1976, 1978, 1979, 1982 and 1984, the U.S. Department of Justice and the Congressional Research Office, 1980; The Ford Foundation, 1986; and the National Service Secretariat, annually since 1966. While they have all recognized the positive educational attributes of service learning, they have also recognized the problems attending what would be a major restructuring of our educational systems including high program startup and maintenance costs, a

political climate hostile to any federally-led or overseen educational initiatives, as well as latent opposition by lower echelon public employees and the military which would be threatened with possible manpower loss under such programs.

There is still ongoing support for youth service among significant sectors of the public policy community. A 1982 Gallup poll of 1,500 opinion leaders reported that 80 percent favored "requiring all young men to give one year of service to the nation, either in the military forces or in nonmilitary work here and abroad . . ." (Danzig and Szanton, 1986).

Young people are also favorably disposed to participating in service activities as an alternative to in-class education. In a 1979 Gallup poll, teenagers (13 - 18 years old), and young adults (18 - 24 years old) were asked if they would favor or oppose a system of voluntary national service in which young people (both men and women) after high school or college would be given opportunities to serve for one year either in the military or in civilian programs such as The Peace Corps or VISTA. 71 percent of the teenagers and 77 percent of the adults reported that they would support such a program of voluntary national service.

As for the public-at-large, a 1978 Gallup poll reported that the great majority of respondents would favor a community service option in high school curricula. Asked if they would favor some kind of

community service for credit for juniors and seniors, seven out of eight of those polled responded favorably. There was to significant difference between respondents in private school, public school, and those with no children in school. (Gallup, 1978, Americans Volunteer). Danzig and Szanton (1986:89) estimate that, ". . . one in every ten U.S. high schools and some entire local school systems offer credit, on an optional basis, for service or for classroom reports or other projects related to service." George Gallup reported to the National Commission on Youth that the Civilian Conservation Corps, the prototype of most modern models of national service, has been the most popular federally-sponsored program ever run. He cited polling data compiled since 1935 to support his contention. In 1984 the results of a Gallup survey indicated that 65 percent of American adults favored a one-year compulsory national service program (with educational benefits), with 58 percent of young people (aged 18 - 24) favoring the same. The breakdowns by individual age cohorts, sex and race yielded similar margins of support across all catagories.

### The Likelihood of Corporate Subversion

While the educational opportunities for our young would almost certainly be enhanced under service activities, this has never been a determining factor in the formulation of educational policy in this

country. The structure of our educational system over the past 140 years has been largely determined by the needs of the American corporate sector (see Katz, 1968, Spring 1972, and Bowles and Gintis, 1976). While there is progress towards practicum at the secondary and post-secondary levels, it is largely on corporate terms. Internships and cooperative education programs whether in the private or public sector, generally do not directly serve society. These programs do not specifically require a service component. Some corporations, such as the McDonald's organization claim that their very hiring of the young constitutes service-learning by giving them discipline, responsibilities, and basic work skills that can be generalized to other career contexts. However, this education is directed along neo-apprenticeship lines. The benefits of these programs go to the corporate or bureaucratic sponsors and to the already employable participants and only rarely to the general public or to disadvantaged youth.

Work in voluntary agencies, while constituting legitimate service, literally doesn't pay, as far as most late adolescents are concerned. Again, only the already privilaged and altruistic can afford the time for those activities. More often than not young volunteers get assigned to the most uninteresting routines, receive no training for more important tasks and thus often get discouraged for their efforts. There is nothing to indicate a change in attitude among national

legislators and other educational policy makers who give lip service to national service but are not willing to commit to any radical restructuring of the educational system without a catastrophic crisis occurring in the present one.

### The Current Status of Youth Service Policy

The closest program at the national-level to national service was the Youth Employment and Demonstration Act of 1977 which was largely directed at training disadvantaged youths in basic job skills. It was killed in 1981 by the Reagan Administration. No Congressional initiatives on national service have been passed although there have been bills to establish either national-service or authorizing studies of national service regularly submitted since the 1970's. Current Congressional supporters of national service include Senators Mark Hatfield of Oregon, Alan Cranston of California, Gary Hart of Colorado and Representative Torricelli of Massachusettes.

Three states, California, Pennsylvania, and Washington as well as New York City, and San Francisco currently have youth service programs in place and running. California and Pennsylvania have their Conservation Corps, and New York City has its New York City Youth Volunteers. In addition there are private programs such as the East Bay Conservation Corps (California), and Volunteers in Mission

(Presbyterian Church - U.S.A.). These programs have early indications of success. Three other states, Connecticut, Minnesota, and New York, are currently considering adopting youth service programs. It is thus at the state and community levels that youth service has made strides. This is where the future of national service in this country may lie.

### National Youth Service in Other Countries

National youth service in other countries has had much greater governmental support. Most countries in the world have a national service program of some type for their young people. Most of them are development-oriented programs aimed at national infrastructure development including rural village-level work for recent graduates in the medical, teaching or engineering professions, national defense obligations, cultural/ethnic integration, or ideological indoctrination. The most comprehensive survey of national youth service programs was done in 1966 by Thomas Cullinan of Terrybrooke Inc. His survey revealed that there were 62 countries with some kind of national service for youth in place. At that time, 44 of the 62 countries that responded to the survey had some kind of compulsory national service program. The others had programs which were voluntary. Of the 44 nations which had compulsory service, 20 allowed a non-military alternative to their citizens. The 20 nations which

had compulsory service with non-military options included Austria, Belgium, Chad, Chile, Columbia, Denmark, Finland, France, Gabon, Greece, Iran, Israel, Italy, Malagasy Republic, The Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, the United States, and Upper Volta. Since that time of course, the United States has dropped compulsory military service, and with it alternative service programs. The study largely ignored non-governmental service programs, did not evaluate the quality of the programs in place. The study is also now rather too dated to be of credible value today. It is, though, a kind of base from which a sense of the extent of national service programs internationally can be measured.

Irene Pinkau 1982, noted that most of the nations of the world then had some form of service geared to national development. She cites lack of education, youth unemployment, cultural and status gaps between diverse population groups (national integration problems), demands to implant social obligation in privilaged and higher educated citizens, and a need to direct the education system to better serve communities in providing social and economic services as primary motivations for undertaking national service programs. In evaluating thirty development services in fifteen countries, Pinkau came up with four catagories of service including; (1) training and employment programs, (2) study services, (3) social and technological development services, and (4) foreign volunteer services. Her descriptions of the

national development programs in Kenya, Nigeria, and Indonesia, as well as her discussion of the prerequisites for national service to be viable as development service is useful to outline here. Very briefly, the Kenyan National Youth Service represents an example of a training and employment effort somewhat akin the the U.S. Job Corps model. Other similar efforts in place include the Benin 4-D clubs, the Botswana Brigades, the Costa Rica National Youth Movement, and the Malaysia Young Pioneers.

The National Youth Service Corps of Nigeria represents a study service model. University students must engage in service activities at the rural village level before graduation. Other similar programs elsewhere include the Indonesian Guliah Kerdja Njata (compulsory), The Nepal National Development Service (compulsory), the Thailand Graduate Volunteer Program, Thammasat University (voluntary), the Morocco, Ghana, and Tanzania University Services (compulsory), the Columbia, Costa Rica, and Brazil University Services (voluntary), the United Kingdom Community Service Volunteers' Study Service (for high school and college students), and the United States National Center for Service Learning, ACTION (small-scale).

The Indonesian Badan Urusan Tenaga Kerdja Sukarela, or BUTSI, represents an example of a social and technical development service. Here, students in certain professional specialties must meet a service requirement before engaging in their formal careers. This is

rationalized as a repayment of the investment that the government has made in their training.

Foreign volunteer services include the American Peace Corps, the Dutch Mellemfolkelight Samvirke, the West German Deutsher Entwicklungsdienst, the Canadian University Service Overseas, and the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers. All of these programs are rigorous in their acceptance of only professionally trained volunteers. Pinkau sees the historical and cultural experience of various countries determining the character of their national service programs. Specifically such factors as history, political structure and experience, the economic system, religious and ethnic makeup of nations all being very important considerations in designing or evaluating the national service programs of other nations.

As mentioned previously, national service in other nations is generally geared to national development. The German model offers an alternative better suited to a post-industrial context. It is layered onto an educational system which is heavily influenced by corporate demands for a technically competent workforce and which has a well-developed apprenticeship structure already in place. The German model is thus more draft-based - that is as an alternative to military service. It is regarded as well-run and of benefit by the German public (Landrum, 1982). The German system includes the military service (Bundeswehr), civilian service (Ziveldienst), development

services (5 separate programs), and technical aid service (Technisches Hilfswerk). Some 80 percent of German youth complete some form of national service with 65 percent of them doing so in the military, 10 percent in civilian service, and the remaining 25 percent in either the development or technical aid services. The 20 percent who don't participate are excused for physical or social reasons. Landrum mentions that the West German system has evolved into its present form citing, "perceived needs for services for youth, legislation, assertion by youth of their constitutional right not to bear arms, and the leadership of several visionary individuals." The result has been a system of non-military service that has managed to maintain a, "practical equilibrium with the National Military Service Act." Whether or not this equilibrium can be maintained in the face of a declining youth population and the vaguries of national political culture is speculative, but the Federal Commissioner concerned with the maintainence of civilian service programs in Germany estimates stabilization of non-military service at around 10 percent of the youth population.

**Summary**

The logic of a service period for youth is consistant with the realities of decreasing opportunities for their traditional

employment, increasing social pathologies, increasing political and social alienation, and the continuing expansion of adolescent status far beyond its physiological or psychological parameters.
It has also evolved from a federally-led, "Great Society"-type concept to a more decentralized state or community-led vision. It would be more useful to consider youth service at the secondary/post-secondary interface as community service nationwide. This might allay the fears of those who object to a large-scale federal presence in education. Nonetheless, some sort of regulation of youth service activities would have to be implemented if service activities for and by youth were to become a reality in this country. A small but growing number of educational reformers believe that such an alteration in our educational structure will eventually take place. It is simply a matter of our post-industrial configuration demanding the shedding of our present industrially-based system which is based on the needs and values of a fading industrial society. This transformation has taken longer than most of its advocates have imagined, but its arrival might be much sooner than the rest of us can guess.

If school-based service were to become a reality however, its administration would become a formidable problematic. The National Commission on Youth notes that, ". . . school boards and the educational apparatus are among the most powerful bureaucracies operating on the local level of government." (National Commission on

Youth, 1980:70). It would be difficult, to say the least, for a new program structure to integrate into the larger structure of the educational establishment. It would almost certainly be eaten alive by the educational bureaucracy and kept subordinate to its larger agenda of system preservation. It might be better to forego to expediency of calling national service, educational reform, and instead present national or community service as what it is - a social obligation which would also have educational merit, would serve as a rite of passage for youth, and which would probably dampen the effects of their structural unemployment among other things.

The future of national service as a public policy issue in this country is as cloudy as ever. Hopefully this piece has helped to clarify its evolution and current status.

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